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ABSTRACT

There are many obstacles to assessing the impact of "new" or disadvantaged students enrolled in community colleges; minority students and staff often oppose such assessments, the conditions and problems in quantifying measurements are difficult to control, and it is difficult to separate and assess interrelated conditions and events which affect the "new" student. This document summarizes what is known about this special group of students in California community colleges, especially changes which have occurred since 1967 in the number of disadvantaged students, the number of minority staff members, new counseling and curricular programs, and drop-out rates. The growing effort to attract students, who because of financial problems and lack of necessary preparation have not attended college in the past, has resulted in great increases in their percentage of the total enrollment. However, many colleges have not provided the necessary special support programs to help the students overcome their handicaps. Consequently, the dropout and failure rate of these new students has been alarming. State and federal money has been and will continue to be crucial for colleges to set up special programs of instruction, student services, counseling, and financial aid necessary for these students. Where such support has been provided, disadvantaged students have averaged the same retention rates, grade point averages and graduation rates as other students. (LP)

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THE "NEW STUDENT" IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Background

The California Community Colleges have always had "open admissions" for all high school graduates and non-graduates at least 18 years of age who can demonstrate their ability to profit from a Community College program. The latter condition has been interpretedvery liberally, with the result that no high school dropouts who apply for admission to Community Colleges are turned away. (The exceptions would be applicants who would not agree to undertake remedial work to improve their academic skills.) In addition to having a long-standing policy of open admissions, the California Community Colleges are by law prohibited from charging tuition and have kept student fees to a minimum. The two other conditions which would tend to attract a student body which is broadly representative of the community served are (1) the geographic accessibility of the Community Colleges, with three campuses and countless centers now offering programs, and (2) the comprehensive nature of their programs, in terms of both intellectual rigor and career interests.

Still, until recently, the Community Colleges were scarcely more successful than the baccalaureate granting institutions in attracting and retaining significant numbers of students from low income families, particularly among the blacks and chicanos. Students from all racial-ethnic minority groups account for slightly more than one-fourth of the public school enrollment in grades kindergarten through 12 in California. These same groups account for 25 percent of the state's population, generally. The

former percentage figure for public school enrollments was adopted as a goal for the Community Colleges to reach through recruitment and special educational programs and services as rapidly as possible. Racial-ethnic data were obtained for the public schools in each Community College district in order to establish local college, as well as state-wide goals. The range across districts was from four to 72 percent, with a median of 21 percent. Five of the 68 Community College districts have more than 50 percent enrollment of minority students in their public schools, while 11 have between one-third and one-half from minority groups.

The absence until recently of Community College students from families whose income is below the poverty level has been difficult to document. The naivety of the assumption that tuition-free colleges cost nothing to attend was not fully recognized until the colleges began to seek solutions to the problem of increasing minority group representation on the campuses. California Community Colleges have tended to attract students whose median family income is lower than that of students enrolling in four-year institutions. However, the incidence of enrollment of students from poverty-level families was low in the absence of substantial student financial aid programs for poor students who fail to qualify for state and other scholarships awarded on a competitive basis.

The third factor which mediated until recently against the influx of substantial numbers of "new students" into the Community Colleges is the inability of the colleges to meet the needs of students with severe educational handicaps resulting from poor public school experience, lack of prior motivation to succeed in school, and/or cultural differences affecting school achievement. The success of the Community Colleges lay in their ability to "salvage" high school graduates who were ineligible

for admission to four-year institutions as freshmen, by offering them programs which enable them to qualify for admission as transfer students to the senior institutions. The assumption was made which has since proven to be unfounded that a simple increase in the amount, i.e., length, of remedial work assigned to students not quite ready for college-level work would meet the needs of the "new students" with severe learning handicaps. Initial experience with the "new students" was thus exceedingly poor in terms of both performance and retention, without the benefit of special programs and services, substantial financial aid for "poor" students (in both the economic and educational sense of the term), and new kinds of staff to work with the "new" students.

New Programs for New Students

In the fall of 1967, the state-level governing board for the Community Colleges, at last aware that old programs might not be working well for the increasing numbers of new students entering college, commissioned a study of "special programs for culturally or socioeconomically disadvantaged students" enrolled in the colleges.* The objectives were to study the educational needs of disadvantaged students, to identify creative and effective programs for disadvantaged students, to suggest other possible approaches to the problem of providing adequate educational programs for such students, and to suggest means by which special programs could be financed.

The study concluded that only minimal special efforts were being made to help the new, disadvantaged students overcome the effects of their educational and economic deprivation in spite of the large numbers who

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*Ernest H. Berg and Dayton Axtell, Programs for Disadvantaged Students in the California Community Colleges (unpublished report, 1968, Peralta Community College District).

were then enrolling and the overall expectation that Community Colleges would increase their enrollment of this new type of student. The related conclusion was drawn that only a few innovative and imaginative programs could be identified in the 31 colleges which were visited on the basis of preliminary information obtained by questionnaire. For perhaps the first time, attention was called to the inadequacy of existing programs of recruitment and early identification of students needing special help, special services, student financial aid, and particularly, remedial courses or experiences to meet the special needs of the disadvantaged. The study also served to discredit the assumption that a tuition-free college costs nothing to attend, by estimating that the cost to a student living at home ranged from $1,000 to $1,400, not including foregone income. (The estimate has increased since then to a statewide average of $1,700 to attend a Community College.) Additional conclusions dealt with policies and practices which are not in the best interests of disadvantaged students, the lack of faculty and staff from minority groups, and the failure of the colleges to take their programs and services out into their communities.

The most important recommendation of the study, in terms of impact, concerned the need for special, additional funding from the state to assist both colleges already enrolling large numbers of disadvantaged students, and colleges attempting to support special programs of instruction, student services, counseling, and financial aid for disadvantaged students. Largely as a result of the study, and with the strong backing of the colleges, special legislation was enacted in 1969 to establish and provide state funds for "Extended Opportunity Programs and Services" in the Community Colleges to be administered by the headquarters office. An initial appropriation was made of $3.5 million for use in 1969-70.

The legislation signalled an end to the use of the term "disadvantaged" to describe the "new student" in the Community Colleges, which was objected to by students from the several ethnic-racial minority groups. Furthermore, the intent of the new program was made clear with respect to its applicability to all students "handicapped by language, social, and economic disadvantages," whose success in college would be improbable in the absence of special assistance. In other words, the legislature did not intend that the program be restricted to racial and ethnic minority groups. The scope of the special programs included instructional programs, student services, and financial aid. Specifically mentioned in the legislation are tutorial services, remedial and developmental courses, multicultural studies, special counseling services, and recruitment programs. Financial aid to students receiving special assistance may include grants and loans of varying size to meet living costs and for student fees, books and materials, and transportation. Provision is also made for funding work-experience and job placement programs. In order to qualify for EOPS funds, Community Colleges are required to submit annual plans and proposals for the use of such funds, together with reports on the characteristics and performance of the student beneficiaries, and on the strengths and weaknesses of the programs which have been funded. Programs were first established in the spring of 1970, with two cycles of funding since that time. A fourth set of allocations to the colleges are to be made for 1972-73.

Concurrent with the establishment of the state program to assist the "new" students with special handicaps, the federal government responded to new and growing demands from the Community Colleges for student aid funds. In order to make proposals for federal funds for Educational Opportunity Grants, National Defense Student Loans, Special Services, and similar

programs, the Community Colleges have been required to assess the financial conditions and needs of all students for the first time, in a way which is having impact on both the way the colleges operate and how they view their students.

Impact on the Community Colleges

The special programs for new types of students in the Community Colleges have had impact both directly and indirectly on the college and the community in the three years since they were established. The most immediate and demonstrable impact has been on the nature of the student body in the Community Colleges, which in turn has had direct impact on the kinds and quality of the programs and services offered. Improvement in student performance and persistence which has resulted from the new programs and services has tended to change the image of the Community College among the sub-populations which it had not served previously--at least, not well--with the consequence that accelerating changes are occurring in both the students and the nature of the programs and services specially established for them.

Changes in the Student Body

Although the Extended Opportunity Program is not intended to be exclusively for ethnic and racial minorities, the impact of the program has been to produce a significant increase in their representation in the student body. The increase from the fall of 1969, before the program was established, and the fall of 1970, when the second group of students received benefits, was 20 percent, from 76,667 to 91,914. Statewide, minorities represented 22 percent of the total day enrollment in the fall of 1970. Among the more than 90 Community Colleges, the percentage of minority group students ranged from 4 to 99 percent, the latter

for a relatively new Community College near the Watts area in Los Angeles. In ten Community Colleges, half or more of the day students were from racial or ethnic minorities in the fall of 1970, while in an additional ten colleges, the percentage of minorities was at least 30 but less than 50. The statewide 22 percent is significantly larger than the 8.5 percent reported for public two-year colleges in the American Council on Education normative report for fall 1971.* The difference would be significantly greater if the California data had also been obtained for freshmen, rather than all day students.

When percentages are examined by ethnic groups, the statewide data for 1970 show that the percentage of Mexican-American and Spanish-surname students was 8.1; black students, 7.6 percent; oriental students, 3.6 percent; and American Indian students, 1.2 percent. (Unidentified "other" minorities account for the remaining 1.4 percent.) Although the percentage of chicano students in California Community Colleges exceeds that in the national norm group by more than five percent, they were enrolled in a proportion almost 50 percent less than their current representation in elementary and secondary schools in 1970. Black students were found to be enrolled in a proportion about ten percent less than their representation in the public schools, while oriental and American Indian students were slightly "over-enrolled." Overall, the survey concluded that minority group students were enrolled in the Community Colleges in a proportion that was about six percent less than their total representation in grades kindergarten through 12, but with 25 of the 68 districts enrolling students in all minority categories in proportions about equal to or exceeding those in their respective kindergarten through 12

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*The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1971, p.39.

enrollments.

Employment of minority faculty and staff by the Community Colleges has increased by 123 percent since 1967, when the last survey of personnel was made, compared with a total staff increase of only 38 percent. Still, minority group personnel constituted only 12.5 percent of the total staff in 1970, compared with a representation of 22 percent in the day enrollment. Still, only three Community Colleges employed no minority teachers or other certificated staff in 1970, while 53 (of 93 total) employed no minority administrators.

Significant increases in minority student representation in the Community Colleges are accelerating the increase in employment of minority faculty and staff in several ways. The most important is the direct role which the new students are playing in locating, recruiting, and then serving on screening committees to select new staff. The less direct impact of increasing minority student representation results from the changing image of the Community College in the eyes of minority educators who were formerly attracted to four-year institutions, and their new-found interest in working successfully with the new students enrolling in Community Colleges.

Impact on Programs and Services

Changing student body characteristics have produced significant changes in programs and services for the new students, accelerated considerably by the availability of new state funds for such programs and services. New uses for personnel have been developed experimentally, whose success was so immediate that procedures were copied by other colleges before the conclusion of pilot projects. Among the changes which occurred since the 1967 assessment are the use of students who are themselves "handi-

capped by language, social, and economic disadvantages" as peer counselors and/or peer tutors. The development of peer counseling roles resulted from the early inability of the colleges to recruit professional counselors who were black or chicano, and the dissatisfaction of the "new" students with the traditional counselors. Tutors have also been recruited and trained from among the ranks of the "handicapped" students, to work with new students possessing similar characteristics. The previously held assumption that tutoring was best done by "honors" students has been abandoned on evidence that students who are overcoming their own handicaps can help other students overcome theirs.

The second major impact on programs has been the move away from long-term, intensive remedial programs for new students with severe learning handicaps, to procedures which enable students to enroll immediately in degree-credit courses, in areas of strong interest, while receiving special help from tutors, in special learning laboratories, or in a limited program of developmental courses. Changes in college policies with respect to withdrawal from courses without penalty, non-punative grading, and reduced course loads have also enhanced the chances of success of the new students in traditional courses.

Finally, the influx of new students into the Community Colleges has accelerated other types of curriculum change resulting from student initiative. First is the development of new ethnic studies programs and courses at a faster than normal rate, as a result of student recruitment of staff and participation in curriculum development. Student initiative was in part responsible for the adoption of a state-wide requirement that each Community College offer at least one ethnic studies course as part of its general education program. The second type of impact has been to increase the volume and scope of student-initiated programs in areas

other than ethnic studies--the free or experimental college, independent study or special projects courses, day-care centers, and off-campus centers for instruction. Major foci in student-initiated programs are ecology, urban problems, the human services, and mythology-astrology-philosophy, as well as ethnic studies.

Impact on Student Performance

Simultaneous changes in student characteristics, programs, supporting services, and policies governing grading and retention reduce the opportunity for assessing impact attributable to particular events or factors. However, a group of 19 Community Colleges began in 1969 a three-year project to develop procedures for the early identification of students with a high probability of dropping out of college, and then to experiment with techniques to reduce early attrition among students so identified. Not surprisingly, the students identified with a high degree of accuracy as probable dropouts (seven correct identifications out of ten) are the "new" students in Community Colleges--black;* from less affluent families, with concerns about finance and employment; with little parental encouragement for college; having lower educational aspirations; and with low demonstrated ability, if a male. New students with high weighted scores on these variables were assigned to experimental and control groups for study.

Each college devised its own programs and services to compensate for the handicaps associated with the characteristics exhibited by the potential dropouts. Results have been analyzed for a total of 1,000 students in 12 participating colleges. Briefly, the results are the following:

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*Enrollment of chicano students was low in the participating institutions.

1. Eleven of the 12 Community Colleges which were able to undertake proper experimentation reported fewer withdrawals during the first semester among those students subjected to "treatment" conditions. Six of the eleven found differences at the five percent level of confidence or better. The results are somewhat surprising in view of the very small samples at many Colleges and the obvious problems of controlling all relevant variables.

2. All twelve colleges employing experimental designs reported higher rates of re-enrollment for the second semester among students subjected to treatment conditions, with eight of the twelve reporting significance levels at the five percent level of confidence or better.

3. Six of the twelve colleges also reported differences in first-semester GPA's which favored the experimental (treatment) groups, with two significant at the five percent level of confidence. Only one college reported a difference which favored the control group very slightly.

4. All Colleges reporting a successful treatment program included counseling in their procedures.

Other treatments included participation in the College Learning Center for special courses, access to programmed materials, reading improvement laboratories, tutoring, special study centers, a pre-college readiness program, and modifications in the college orientation program--all possible with Extended Opportunity Program and Services funding, but conducted for the most part independently in this special study.

An annual assessment of students and programs receiving state EOPS funds is performed by the participating colleges. The first group of first-time

students receiving EOPS assistance were in the CommunityColleges in 1970-71, since the first programs were funded at mid-year in 1969-70, too late to be made available to first-time freshmen. Initial data show that the EOPS students are for the most part the "new" students having various impact on the Community Colleges. Of the nearly 20,000 students receiving assistance, 72 per cent represented minority groups--31 per cent, chicano; 32 per cent, black; four per cent, oriental; three per cent, American Indian; two per cent, other non-white; and 28 per cent, white. The percentage distribution does not differ significantly from the percentages found for the minority groups in the total day student population at the colleges. Using base enrollment data from the ethnic survey, it is possible to estimate that about 15 per cent of the minority students were receiving assistance under the state-funded EOPS program in 1970-71, compared with only two per cent of the non-minority student population.* Among the approximately 20,000 students in the EOPS program, 34 per cent received program services only (tutoring, special counseling, special instruction), 27 per cent received financial aid only, and 39 per cent received both financial aid and program services.

Analysis of first-year performance showed that the EOPS students achieved a grade-point average of 2.05, with a C equal to 2.0. This represents a considerable improvement over the record of minority students prior to the establishment of EOP services, and compares favorably with the record made by the total student population. EOPS students with sophomore standing attained a GPA of 2.50, which does not differ significantly from the GPA of 2.51 earned by all students. The improved sophomore record is due in part to the attrition

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*It should be noted that special assistance funds from federal and other sources exceeded the EOPS funds in 1970-71. However, funds are primarily for financial aid, rather than services, from the federal programs.

of the weaker students after the freshman year, and the reduction of the handicap the persisters brought to college as freshmen. The large number of students receiving financial aid only are among the sophomores with better-than-average grades.

The second measure of impact on student performance is the number of EOPS students who attained an identified goal after the second year of the program. A total of 5,319 EOPS students were thus successful (out of a possible total of about 14,000), with 2,742 receiving a degree, 2,295 completing two years of work without a degree, and 282 earning a certificate.

Conclusion

Systematic assessment of the impact of substantial increases in the percentage of "new" students on campus is difficult to conduct for many reasons--the opposition of minority students and related staff to such assessments, the lack of control over the conditions to be assessed, problems in quantifying measurements, and the interdependence of the various objects and events to be assessed. However, case history techniques can be modified so as to make it possible to predict and then assess changes in institutions over time, in terms of the impact of events on student characteristics, programs and services, student performance, and the image of the college. The present report is presented so as to give a brief description of one possible approach to this problem of assessment of change.

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